

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-01

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 NIC-01 ACDA-05 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 EB-04

IO-04 DRC-01 CEA-01 /072 W

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R 151803Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4783

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: HEATH FACES FUTURE

REF: LONDON 13308

SUMMARY: CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADER HEATH IS REPORTEDLY
CONSIDERING POSSIBILITY OF RESIGNING AS LEADER BECAUSE OF
CONSERVATIVE LOSSES IN THE ELECTION. CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN
THE PARTY ARE REPORTEDLY ANXIOUS TO REPLACE HIM AS SOON
AS POSSIBLE, WITH PARTY CHAIRMAN WHITELAW AND SIR KEITH
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JOSEPH NAMED AS MOST VIABLE CANDIDATES. HEATH HIMSELF,

OF COURSE, PROBABLY RETAINS SOME CONTROL OVER WHETHER HE STAYS, FOR EVEN HIS MOST SEVERE CRITICS WOULD NOT WISH FOR PARTY DISUNITY AT THIS TIME. HEATH PROBABLY ALSO CONTROLS THE TIMING OF HIS DEPARTURE IF HE DECIDES TO RESIGN, AND HE WILL LIKELY WISH TO REMAIN LEADER FOR THE DEBATES ON THE QUEEN'S SPEECH AND PERHAPS DISCUSSION OF HEALEY'S BUDGET IN NOVEMBER. END SUMMARY.

1. CONSERVATIVE LEADER HEATH HAS COME UNDER HEAVY FIRE AS A RESULT OF THE PARTY'S ELECTION LOSSES. THE 1922 COMMITTEE, WHICH IS AN EXECUTIVE ORGANIZATION OF THE PARTY, MET SOMEWHAT UNUSUALLY ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, APPARENTLY AT THE INSTIGATION OF AND AT THE HOME OF EDWARD DUCANN; THE MEETING ITSELF WAS DESCRIBED BY SOME AS UNAUTHORIZED, SINCE IT WAS COMPOSED EXCLUSIVELY OF MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY OF THE LAST PARLIAMENT AND NOT OF THE NEWLY-ELECTED ONE. ATTEMPTS OF JOURNALISTS TO GET REPORTS ON WHAT THE COMMITTEE MAY HAVE DECIDED HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL, BUT THE CONSENSUS OF MOST REPORTERS AND OBSERVERS IS THAT HEATH SHOULD GO, BUT UNSPECIFIC AS TO WHO SHOULD REPLACE HIM.

2. INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS HAVE EXPRESSLY CALLED FOR HEATH'S DEPARTURE. CANDIDATES NOTED THAT, WHEN CANVASSING ON THE DOOR-STEP, HEATH WAS RAISED AS A REASON NOT TO VOTE CONSERVATIVE. SOME REPORTS HAVE NOW SURFACED THAT HEATH HIMSELF WAS NEAR TO ANNOUNCING HIS WILLINGNESS TO STEP DOWN DURING THE CAMPAIGN AS AN EFFORT TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL UNITY, BUT WAS DISSUADED BY ADVISERS. THE MONDAY CLUB, AN ORGANIZATION OF CONSERVATIVE CONSERVATIVES, HAS NOW CALLED FOR HIS REPLACEMENT AND A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATISM.

3. SPECULATION ON A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR HAS ALSO FILLED THE PRESS. WHITELAW, CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY, IS AN OBVIOUS CHOICE. HOWEVER, HE HAS CERTAIN DISADVANTAGES -- HE HAS OPENLY AVOWED HIS LOYALTY TO HEATH WHICH IDENTIFIES HIM PERHAPS TOO CLOSELY WITH HEATH AND THE HEATHIAN LINE. HE IS CONSIDERED WITHIN THE PARTY AS A "GOOD GUY" BUT WITH PERHAPS NOT THE INTELLIGENCE OR INTELLECT TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LEAD THE PARTY AGAINST WILSON IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE.

4. SIR KEITH JOSEPH HAS BEEN PROMINENTLY MENTIONED AS A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR AND WOULD PROBABLY BE ACCEPTABLE TO CONSERVATIVES ON THE RIGHT. HE IS CONSIDERED BRIGHT, INTELLIGENT, A COOL INTELLECTUAL WHO COULD STAND UP WELL TO LABOR IN PARLIAMENT. HOWEVER, HE DOESN'T APPEAR TO HAVE MUCH APPEAL TO THE GROUP CURRENTLY AROUND HEATH OR

TO YOUTHFUL PARTY MEMBERS WHO WANT A NEW IMAGE FOR THE PARTY.

5. LESS PROMINENTLY FIGURING IN THE SPECULATION ABOUT A SUCCESSOR ARE DU CANN HIMSELF, MARGARET THATCHER, AND SIR CHRISTOPHER SOAMES, WHO HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION OF REMAINING IN BRUSSELS DURING CURRENT EC RENEGOTIATIONS BEFORE RETURNING TO ACTIVE POLITICAL LIFE IN BRITAIN.

6. IMMEDIATELY AFTER ELECTION, HEATH TOOK SOME WELL-EARNED REST, TELLING REPORTERS HE WAS GOING TO THINK THINGS OVER. REPORTEDLY HE HAS BEEN RECEIVING CONFLICT-

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ING ADVICE FROM ALL SIDES: RESIGN AS LEADER NOW, DON'T RESIGN NOW, DON'T SAY ANYTHING NOW, SAY YOU'RE GOING TO STEP DOWN LATER, ETC. AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, HE WILL SPEAK TO THE NATION OCTOBER 15 IN RESPONSE TO WILSON'S APPEAL TO THE NATION OCTOBER 14.

7. OBSERVERS AND THEORETICIANS CONSIDER NOW THAT UNSEEMLY HASTE WILL ONLY RESULT IN FURTHER DIFFICULTIES INTERNALLY FOR THE PARTY. THIS SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT PAR-

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TY MEMBERS IN GENERAL ARE WILLING TO LEAVE THE INITIATIVE WITH HEATH ON WHEN HE GOES, SO LONG AS IT SEEMS DEFINITE THAT HE IS RESIGNING. SHOULD IT BECOME APPARENT IN THE WEEKS OR DAYS AHEAD THAT HE IS NOT VOLUNTARILY DECIDING TO RESIGN AS LEADER, THIS SENTIMENT MIGHT WELL LEAD TO A MORE AGGRESSIVE STAND BY SOME ELEMENTS WITHIN THE PARTY AND POSSIBLY A SHOWDOWN.

8. SHOULD THE LATTER BE THE CASE, IT WOULD APPEAR DOUBTFUL AT THIS TIME THAT HEATH COULD GARNER ENOUGH SOLID SUPPORT WITHIN THE PARTY TO REMAIN LEADER; AFTER ALL, HEATH IS SEEN AS LEADER OF THE PARTY WHICH LOST IN FEBRUARY AND LOST FURTHER IN OCTOBER AND MEMORIES OF HIS VICTORY IN 1970 ARE FADING FAST. IT MAY WELL BE ARGUED THAT THE PARTY'S LOSS IN OCTOBER WAS SMALLER THAN ANTICIPATED BECAUSE OF HEATH'S LEADERSHIP, BUT THIS IS PROBABLY NOT A SUFFICIENTLY STRONG ARGUMENT TO JUSTIFY HOLDING ON TO HEATH.

9. IN ALL THE THEORIZING ABOUT REPLACING HEATH, THE WEAKNESS LIES IN THE ABSENCE OF A GENERALLY OR WIDELY ACCEPTABLE HEIR APPARENT. THERE SEEMS TO BE NO ONE IN THE PARTY'S SECOND ECHELON WHO IS ACCEPTED AS THE UNIVERSAL CHOICE. THUS THE PARTY, RATHER THAN SUCCUMBING TO AN INTERNECINE CONFLICT OVER REPLACING HEATH, MAY HOLD ON TO HIM AND RESIST A CHANGE IN THE STATUS QUO FOR TACTICAL REASONS RATHER THAN BECAUSE OF SUPPORT OF AND LOVE FOR HEATH. IN THIS RESPECT, HEATH'S OWN ATTITUDE BECOMES OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE AND, OF THIS, NEITHER THE JOURNALISTS NOR THE EMBASSY HAS AS YET ANY CLEAR SIGNAL. IT IS PERHAPS TRITE TO ADD THAT HEATH'S PERSONAL DECISION WILL BE BASED PRIMARILY ON WHAT HE THINKS BEST FOR THE PARTY AND THE NATION; IF HE BECOMES CON-

VINCE SOMEONE ELSE WILL DO A BETTER JOB IN LEADING THE
OPPOSITION IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT THAN HE, HE WOULD HAVE
LITTLE PROBLEM IN REACHING A DECISION TO RESIGN.

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